

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

USMISSION USBERLIN

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AMCONSUL DUSSELDORF

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E. O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT GW

SUBJ: EPPLER ON THE FIRING LINE

1. SUMMARY: BADEN-WUERTTEMBERG SPD CHAIRMAN ERHARD EPPLER PARTICIPATED IN MOST RECENT STUTTGART NACHRICHTEN TREFFPUNK FOYER SERIES FOCUSING ON THE APRIL 4 LANDTAG ELECTION. INITIAL QUESTIONS DEALT WITH THE CONTRASTING STYLES OF EPPLER AND HIS MAJOR OPPONENT, CDU MINISTER PRESIDENT FILBINGER. EPPLER WAS NOT OVERLY OPTIMISTIC BUT STILL HARBORS HOPES OPPOSITION CAN BREAK THE CDU LAND MAJORITY. LAND ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL ISSUES GENERATED CONSIDERABLE INTEREST. EPPLER COMES ACROSS AS INTENSE, INTELLECTUAL, AND FORTHRIGHT POLITICIAN, BUT IT IS DIFFICULT TO GAUGE EXTENT TO WHICH THESE QUALITIES CAN BE TRANSLATED INTO ADDITIONAL VOTES FOR BADEN-WUERTTEMBERG SPD. END SUMMARY.

2. BADEN-WUERTTEMBERG SPD CHAIRMAN ERHARD EPPLER ENGAGED THE PRESS AND PUBLIC IN VIGOROUS EXCHANGE IN THE STUTTGART NACHRICHTEN FEBRUARY 25 TREFFPUNK FOYER PROGRAM. INITIAL
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QUESTIONS FOCUSED ON THE CONTRASTING STYLES BETWEEN EPPLER

AND HIS MAJOR CDU OPPONENT MINISTER PRESIDENT FILBINGER. EPPLER DISPUTED POPULAR NOTIONS ABOUT HIS LACK OF POPULARITY AND SAID HE HAD FIGURES PROVING HE WAS AS POPULAR IN THE SPD AS FILBINGER WAS IN THE CDU. EPPLER READILY ADMITTED HE AND THE SPD HAD NO GREAT CHANCE OF BREAKING THE CDU LAND MAJORITY BUT WOULD NEVERTHELESS FIGHT HARD TO DO SO. IN THE DISCUSSION LAND ISSUES CLEARLY OVERSHADOWED NATIONAL ONES. WHILE EPPLER SAID HE STOOD SOLIDLY WITH SPD CHANCELLOR SCHMIDT, HE SAID HE WOULD PLACE MUCH GREATER EMPHASIS ON PROMOTING LAND INTERESTS THAN FOLLOWING ANY POLICY DIRECTED BY SCHMIDT.

3. THIS LED TO A DISCUSSION OF BADEN-WUERTTEMBERG ECONOMIC PROBLEMS AND EPPLER'S REPORTED VIEWS ON "INVESTITIONSLLENKUNG". EPPLER SAID THAT IT MIGHT COME AS A SURPRISE TO A NUMBER OF THOSE PRESENT THAT HE DID NOT SHARE THE IDEAS ON "INVESTITIONSLLENKUNG" ATTRIBUTED TO SOME ELEMENTS OF HIS PARTY. IF ONE MEANT BY THIS TERM THE PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT OF CERTAIN MAJOR PROJECTS SUCH AS TRANSPORTATION SYSTEMS AND OTHER INFRASTRUCTURE ELEMENTS OF THE ECONOMY, THIS IS SOMETHING ALL GERMAN GOVERNMENTS, INCLUDING THOSE DIRECTED BY THE CDU, HAVE BEEN ENGAGED IN FOR YEARS. HE EXPRESSED CONVICTIONS THAT THE MARKET ECONOMY PROVIDED AMPLE OPPORTUNITY FOR IMPROVEMENT BEFORE GOING FURTHER INTO DIRECTED INVESTMENT. HE WOULD EMPHASIZE MORE THOUGHTFUL CONSIDERATION AND PLANNING OF MAJOR PROJECTS MORE CLOSELY RELATED TO REGIONAL REQUIREMENTS. HE GAVE THE EXAMPLES OF CERTAIN AUTOBAHNS BEING CONSIDERED AND THE UNDERDEVELOPED HOHENLOHE REGION OF BADEN-WUERTTEMBERG AS EXAMPLES.

4. EPPLER'S WELL-KNOWN VIEWS ON RISING MEDICAL EXPENSES CAME IN FOR SHARP CRITICISM FROM THE MANY DOCTORS IN THE AUDIENCE. HE ADMITTED TO EARLIER ERRORS IN NOT EXAMINING CRITICALLY ENOUGH THE DEVELOPMENT OF MEDICAL INSTITUTIONS AND INSURANCE FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF THEIR EFFICACY AND COST. HE RELIED ON THE STATISTIC THAT FOR SEVERAL YEARS REAL WAGES OF GERMAN LABOR HAD INCREASED FOUR TO FIVE PERCENT, WHEREAS DOCTORS' INCOME HAD RISES 12 1/2 PERCENT DURING THE PAST YEAR. HE ALSO POINTED TO REPORTS FROM PARENTS THAT CHILDREN RETURNED FROM SOME MEDICAL INSTITUTIONS IN THE BLACK FOREST LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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MORE PSYCHOLOGICALLY DAMAGED THAN THEY WERE FROM THEIR ORIGINAL ILLNESS. THIS SEEMED TO EVOKE A POSITIVE RESPONSE AS DID COMMENTS ON THE INADEQUACY OF EDUCATION FROM THE MOTHERS PRESENT IN THE AUDIENCE. HOWEVER, THE REACTION OF THE DOCTORS AND PHARMACISTS PRESENT CLEARLY INDICATES THAT EPPLER HAS BECOME FULLY ENGAGED WITH A CONTROVERSIAL ISSUE.

5. GREATEST APPLAUSE CAME WHEN EPPLER SAID ONE WAY TO SOLVE

SOME OF BADEN-WUERTTEMBERG'S PROBLEMS WAS TO GET A NEW MINISTER OF CULTURE. HE ADDED THAT CULTURAL POLICY WAS THE MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE IN BADEN-WUERTTEMBERG. SOME IN THE AUDIENCE BATED EPPLER ON EDUCATIONAL POLICIES AND LACK OF JOBS FOR TEACHERS. HE REPLIED THAT THE BABY BOOM YEARS HAD CREATED IDEAL CONDITIONS FOR TEACHERS 5-10 YEARS AGO BUT CHANGING TIMES HAD CREATED AN EMPLOYMENT SQUEEZE.

6. EPPLER SHOWED CONSIDERABLE UNDERSTANDING, IF NOT A GREAT DEAL OF SYMPATHY, FOR THE SITUATION IN THE US AS HE DREW MANY PARALLELS BETWEEN THE SCENE IN THE US AND IN GERMANY TO MAKE HIS POINTS ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS.

7. COMMENT: EPPLER CAME ACROSS AS A FRANK, FORTHRIGHT AND HONEST MAN TRYING TO WORK OUT SENSIBLE SOLUTIONS TO SERIOUS PROBLEMS. HE ALSO APPEARED ALMOST TOO READY TO TAKE ON ALL CHALLENGERS ON ANY AND EVERYTHING WHICH FREQUENTLY PREVENTED HIM FROM MAKING POLITICAL POINTS CLEARLY AND DIRECTLY. ON OTHER OCCASIONS HE SEEMED TO EITHER ANNOY AND/OR CONFUSE MANY BASIC SPD SUPPORTERS IN THE AUDIENCE. GENERAL MEDIA COVERAGE OF EPPLER HAS BEEN DIFFICULT TO FATHOM AND SEEMS MOR HEAVILY INFLUENCED BY POLITICAL COLORATION THAN IS CASE WITH MINISTER PRESIDENT FILBINGER AND THE CDU. JENKINS

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